

IWO JIMA EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP NEWS

Spring 2006 Issue



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From the Commodore...

Greetings,

It is with great pleasure that I provide you the inaugural issue of the Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group (ISG) newsletter. As the ISG Commander, I have the opportunity to see the great work and spirit of our Navy-Marine Corps team. This is an extraordinary Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG). Day by day, I am ever more impressed with the enthusiasm, drive and determination exhibited by the Sailors and Marines of the ISG. It is my hope that this Newsletter will be a way for you to share in my pride by seeing the pictures and reading about some of the many accomplishments that make us the most flexible fighting force the world has ever known.

Thus far, ISG has completed several movements and performed admirably at sea. Several of the ships in the group, Iwo Jima and Whidbey Island, got a head start on the rest by their work in support of operations on the Gulf Coast in response to Hurricane Katrina. Our first Group Sail (GRUSL) was conducted in support of Navy Network Command's annual exercise, Trident Warrior 2005 (TW05). During TW05, the ISG had the opportunity to test communication systems with our partner nations in a dynamic at-sea environment. It also afforded us an opportunity to begin Marine aviation operations with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit's (MEU)



Above: Commodore Sinclair Harris talks with troops during an evening at-sea Captain's Call held onboard the USS Cole (DDG 67) Photo by Lt. Karen Eifert

"I would be lying to you if I said I could tell you exactly where we are going or what we will do. The world is a dynamic place..."

Aviation Command Element (ACE).

Our first underway event of 2006 was GRUSL 1 and 2. The MEU ground and support forces concentrated on unit level training in the field at Fort A. P. Hill. At sea, we continued the long qualification process training for the ACE, driver training, and the completion of ship-level certifications. Following that, we completed Expeditionary Strike Group Integration (ESGINT) where the majority of the

MEU embarked, and nearly all the ships worked through more complex multi-ship operations. Our Expeditionary Strike Submarine (USS Albuquerque) joined us along with the Maritime Patrol aircraft from VP 8 for intense submarine (and anti-submarine) warfare training.

On the heels of ESGINT, many of the operators came to Tactical Training Group Atlantic in Dam Neck, Va. for simulator training. This provided time for the ships to do much-needed repairs, and for the Marines to prepare for their urban environment training (TRUEx). You will see an article later in this issue that provides more details on this realistic and difficult training.

As I write this introduction to you, we are all back at sea conducting our major certification exercise, ESG exercise (ESGEX 06). Commander Strike Force Training Atlantic Rear Adm. Richard O'Hanlon and his team are embarked on all our

ships, and taking us through our paces across all warfare areas.

There are so many "good news stories" across the group that I know that some will be missed. We have tried to capture as many as possible and include something that you will find of interest. Let me close by encouraging you all to take time to attend your command's Pre-Deployment Briefings and to prepare to take PACE education courses while we are deployed. Every ship and unit has taken great strides to package a plethora of useful information into a very concise format that will help you (shipmates and family members alike) to endure the hardships of deployment better. Many tips and smart ideas are available for coping with the separation from loved ones. Please take the opportunity to attend.

I also encourage each Sailor and Marine to sign up

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Secretary of the Navy Visits USS Iwo Jima

By JOSN Remus E. Borisov, Fleet

Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter arrived aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) Feb. 15, to meet and speak with Sailors during his first visit to Norfolk since being sworn in as the 74th Secretary of the Navy.

Winter arrived at the pier shortly before noon and met with Capt. Richard S. Callas, commanding officer of Iwo Jima, for a tour of the ship and a re-enlistment ceremony.

An all hands call following the ceremony gave Winter a chance to speak to the crew about his role as their new leader.

"It's been great to meet with Sailors and Marines around the world during my tour," said Winter. "I've been the secretary for six weeks, and I'm trying to discover what is happening with the Navy and what will happen in the future of the Navy."

Winter spoke to Sailors about the Navy's role in the global war on terrorism and the humanitarian relief operations in terms of post-war reconstruction and disaster response.

"The global war on terrorism isn't just warfare, it's also about winning hearts and minds by being respectful of where we are," said Winter. "I'm



Above: Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV), the Honorable Dr. Donald C. Winter stands with four Sailors after issuing the oath of enlistment on board the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7). Winter was on his first tour of the fleet after being sworn in as the 74th SECNAV.

Photo by PHAN Kenneth R. Hendrix

proud to be a part of a nation that really cares, a nation that looks in itself to be better, a nation that helps establish democracies."

Winter commended Iwo Jima Sailors and Marines who were first on the scene for the relief efforts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"I really appreciate what you've done there (Gulf Coast)," said Winter, in regard to the hurricane response. "Thank you for continuing to serve the Navy."

Prior to visiting Iwo Jima, Winter met with wounded Sailors and Marines in Bethesda, Md., toured the facilities at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, participated in the commissioning ceremony for USS San Antonio (LPD 17), looked at several shipyards, and most recently toured the Middle East visiting with Marines and Sailors conducting combat operations in the region.

ISG Commander shows support for 24th MEU at A. P. Hill

**Story and photo
by Lt. Karen E. Eifert**

Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group (ISG) Commander Capt. Sinclair Harris visited Fort A.P. Hill, Va., Jan. 13-14 to observe training exercises and better understand Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) operations on the ground.

Harris made the trip to the 76,000-acre military training installation to see

the MEU in action, participate in unit-level training events and discuss ISG-MEU distributed operations.

"Watching the Marines train in wet and frigid temperatures drove home the fact that MEU training is as realistic as it gets," said Harris.

In harsh weather conditions, rugged terrain, and at all times of day and night, the Marines were sharpening their skills, and those returning from Iraq motivated

those who were new.

The facilities at Fort A.P. Hill provided the Marines the ability to work many ground warfare scenarios.

"It is no wonder they are the finest fighting force in the world, and I am completely committed to continuing training with them on our ships at sea. The ESG-MEU combination really is the most flexible and ready war-fighting

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Commodore's message continued from page 2

right away for PACE. Whether you plan to do one tour in the military or an entire career, you'll find the education that can be obtained while serving at sea will be invaluable.

As you read the newspapers and watch TV, you will see the Navy working around the world and around-the-clock in everything from humanitarian relief to anti-piracy efforts. You will see our Marines on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. You will hear of the Navy engaging with partners, as well as

developing nations in the Ukraine, Africa and Middle East. With all this coverage, I know many of you want to know exactly where we will go and what we will do during our upcoming deployment.

I would be lying to you if I said I could tell you exactly where we are going or what we will do. The world is a dynamic place, and we are a flexible force designed to operate anywhere and at any time. We have talented officers in our wardrooms, great skills and pro-

fessionalism in our crews/troops. We also have the best leadership in the world in our Chief Petty Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers. When you combine this great team with the training and preparation we are undertaking, I believe you will see why I am confident that whatever the task, we will live up to our motto and be READY TO LAND.

Commodore Sinclair Harris
ISG Commander

Fort A. P. Hill Continued from page 3

team in the world," he continued.

Master Sgt. Donald Funkhouser, the MEU Battalion Planning Team Operations Chief who recently participated in the ISG's Group Sail I, said he was surprised by the positive interactions he's witnessed between Sailors and Marines while onboard the Iwo Jima.

"Everyone onboard the ship has been very friendly and attentive to our needs. They've welcomed us into what is essentially their home," Funkhouser said.

Referring to Commodore Harris' visit to A.P. Hill, the 23-year veteran said, "This is the first time I have ever seen a Navy Commodore come out and see how we train and what we do. It makes me excited to be a part of the strike group."

Commodore Harris covered a large portion of the facility grounds and both observed and participated in several live-fire operations during his two days at Fort A.P. Hill. He stopped to talk with troops and witness their



Above: Colonel Ron Johnson and Commodore Sinclair Harris talk with a young Marine after both spent the morning observing training exercises at Fort A.P. Hill.

command and control of ground operations firsthand. Harris listened as young Marines explained the process of purifying brackish water, and then as they rapidly dismounted light armored vehicles to secure perimeters in less than five minutes. Finally, he observed combat engineers as they trained assault troops in various tactics using C4I explosives.

The commodore even played an active role in the urban environment training where he posed as an insurgent during a raid on a mock village.

24th MEU Commander, Col. Ron Johnson, was excited the Commodore took the time to support the training exercises. After delivering a motivating pep talk to his troops and shunning the 20-

degree weather, Johnson imparted Harris' message exactly when he discussed the upcoming deployment. He said the deployment would not be one where the MEU operated on its own. He said, "The Navy will be there working with us side by side. This is because 'it's one team, and it's one fight.'"

Iwo Jima ESG sailors graduate from VBSS Training

Story and photos
by Lt. Karen E. Eifert

NOTE: Last names were omitted from this story to protect VBSS identities

CHESAPEAKE- Twenty sailors from the Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group (ISG) completed a three-week Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) course at the Center for Anti-Terrorism and Navy Security Forces (CENATNSF) located at the Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex in Chesapeake March 17.

The VBSS course trained sailors from the USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41), USS Cole (DDG 67) and USS Bulkeley (DDG 84) to combat global issues such as piracy, human trafficking and drug trafficking, while instilling in them a requisite anti-terrorism warfare mindset.

"The training down at CENATNSF was intense and realistic, and we know it will pay huge dividends during our upcoming deployment. We are greatly reassured by the professional training we have received to date," said Whidbey Island Commanding Officer Cmdr. Eric M. Ross who has remained involved with the progress of Whidbey Island's VBSS team since it formed.

The rigorous mind and body course the ISG sailors completed included a classified focus on theatre-specific rules of engagement and appropriate detainee handling

measures. It also focused on producing physically fit and tactically enabled sailors who are fully prepared to augment the Navy's already premier security force currently serving on the seas in support of the global war on terror.

Lt. j.g. Pete of the Whidbey Island played an integral role in the VBSS training since he served as the boarding officer during the mock scenarios. He delivered the first training scenario to the VBSS team members.

"This is going to be a non-compliant boarding," Lt. j.g. Pete explained, "mainly because the vessel was unresponsive to bridge-to-bridge hails and a variety of other attempts to communicate with them. There is an unknown number of crew onboard, but three have already been visualized," he continued.

After reminding the teams to be safe and keep the



Above: ISG sailors scale a mock ship during a visit, board, search and seizure exercise (VBSS) held at Anti-terrorism and Navy Security Forces in Chesapeake. **Below:** A sailor searches a suspected pirate for contraband and vital documents after boarding the vessel during the mock VBSS.

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crew of the boarded ship as calm as possible, the 20 sailors divided into three teams. They commenced the training by ascending the ship in three separate waves of force.

Once onboard the vessel, team members made haste securing the vessel, conducting a thorough search for important documents such as passports and shipboard logs. They also focused on locating crew members in hiding and planning an ambush.

An instructor posed as a defiant crew member who became combative after being discovered hiding in a rack. However, he was immediately subdued by three VBSS team members. After a thorough search for contraband, the crew member's passport was confiscated and he was led to the bridge of the vessel where he was detained throughout the remainder of the exercise. Several other instructors onboard the mock vessel shared the same fate.

"We improve upon this course with information fed to us from Navy ships once they've completed their missions," said Chief David, the head instructor at CENATNSF. Chief David explained that scenarios the training facility conducts are never exactly the same since instructors tailor their actions in direct response to the way students respond to them during scenarios.

Now alumni of CENATNSF, the 20 ISG sailors can boast they've graduated from one of the

most top-notch anti-terrorism schools of its kind in the country. The school, which began instructing about 13 months ago and has graduated less than 30 classes, is already credited with training the VBSS teams onboard two of the most high-profile Navy vessels associated with piracy today. CENATNSF instructors trained the USS Winston Churchill's VBSS team, which nabbed pirates while operating in the Indian Ocean back in January. These instructors also trained the VBSS teams onboard the USS Cape St. George and USS Gonzalez that were fired upon by pirates March 17 while operating off the coast of Somalia.

"We give students a baseline of instruction from which to be successful," said Chief David. "While we would like to count any successful boarding by former

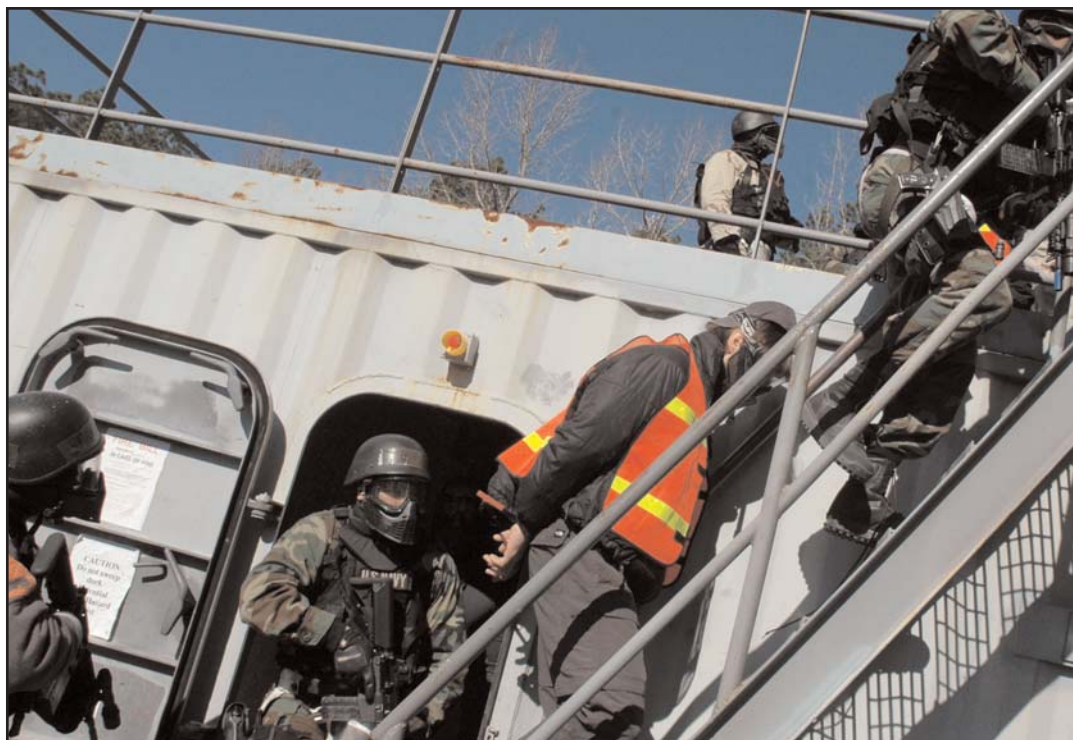


Above: ISG sailors scale a mock ship during a visit, board, search and seizure exercise (VBSS) held at Anti-terrorism and Navy Security Forces in Chesapeake. **Below:** A sailor searches a suspected pirate for contraband and vital documents after boarding the vessel during the mock VBSS.

students as our own, the real credit goes to their ship because it's the consistent drilling that ultimately makes them successful."

Chief David said the sailors from the Iwo Jima Strike Group adapted well to

the expectations of a challenging course. "Somewhere down the line of their deployment we'll expect to hear great things about the Iwo Jima strike group too," Chief David said.



USS Nashville sailors make TRUEx more true-to-life for 24th MEU



Above: Sailors from the USS Nashville puts their hearts into role playing as insurgents and Iraqi casualties during the 24th MEU's TRUEx exercises held onboard Naval Station Norfolk. **Below:** A 24th MEU Marine takes one of the first hostages of the day.

Story and photos By Lt. Karen E. Eifert

Twenty sailors from the USS Nashville (LPD 13) made Marine pre-deployment training more true-to-life by participating in the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit's (MEU) Training in an Urban Environment exercise (TRUEx) portion held onboard Norfolk Naval Station from February 27 to March 12.

Answering a MEU call for volunteers, Nashville sailors role played as insurgents and Iraqi villagers-turned rioters and casualties as 2,200 Marines from the

24th MEU performed mock raids on a mock Iraqi village.

"Everything in the scenario was made to appear as real as the Marines would experience it in actual combat," said USS Nashville Commanding Officer Capt. Dee L. Mewbourne who said he was thrilled the Nashville

sailors took time to participate in the MEU training. "This is not just an opportunity for these sailors to lend their support to the exercise; it's an opportunity for them to see some of the things these Marines will likely encounter once they deploy."

TRUEx, the largest Marine

exercise of its kind performed prior to each MEU deployment, teaches Marines to fight and sustain forces in an urban environment, rehearses command and control tactics and increases the unit's ability to access functional support over a dispersed area.

The authenticity of the exercise was further enhanced by the use of live explosives, smoke, small arms weapons and mock homes built to look like those inhabited by local nationals. There were even Iraqi-speaking actors and actual amputees.



Shipmates,



It's great to be back aboard the Iwo Jima. I can't think of a more imposing name for the flagship of a Marine-bearing strike group.

Thanks to your hospitality and an earlier-than-expected opportunity to spend some time aboard the ship in September while supporting hurricane-relief efforts, the 24th MEU feels right at home here.

We're looking forward to meeting the rest of the ISG, in particular the crews who will host us aboard the Nashville and Whidbey Island.

With the holidays behind us, we can now turn our full attention to preparing ourselves for combat. Group Sail is our first chance to shake the cobwebs out, to cement the working relationships that will be so crucial to success, to get our communications systems up and running, to nail down our command-and-control procedures, to get our pilots their at-sea qualifications. If the glorious weather continues, we'll be way ahead of the game heading into ESGINT.

At this time two years ago, we were preparing to lock on with the Saipan strike group. Halfway through our pre-deployment training program, prior to ESGEX, we received orders to Iraq. We had anticipated that possibility and adjusted our training objectives accordingly, ensuring we would be ready to go early if called. We've brought the same mindset and approach to the current training cycle. Since time is our enemy, we'll be pushing hard to make the most of every training day.

It's an exciting time to be a warrior of the sea. Stay in the attack.

Semper Fidelis,
R. J. Johnson
24th MEU Commander

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"I came out here to help because I was asked to," said 24-year-old USS Nashville sailor Seaman Rodney A. Powell, who was suffering from a simulated head injury after playing the role of an Iraqi villager turned-casualty. Powell, who hopes to become a hospital corpsman in the future said he was not turned off any by the blood or any of the other elements that made the exercise so real as a result of his previous career as an emergency medical technician.

"Playing this part gave me a chance to see that the Marines also do a lot of what I used to do before I entered the military."

As the goal is to bring as many Marines back alive as possible, MEU Commander Col. Ron Johnson said it was no surprise to him the Nashville sailors came out to support a training evolution that will help bring the Marines home alive.

"Sailor participation at this level once gain showed the seamless integration and interoperability between the Navy and Marine Corps," Johnson said.

SN Rodney A. Powell (top) and SN Jason Moreno (middle) of amphibious transport dock Nashville are rescued by Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit during the Training in an Urban Environment

exercises recently held onboard Naval Station Norfolk. The Nashville Sailors role played as Iraqi civilians-turned casualties, making the training as authentic as possible for the North-Carolina based Marines. Below: Marines from the 24th MEU rush a wounded Iraqi (mock-played by SN Jason Moreno) on a gurney. Once in a secure location, he was triaged and his injuries were care for by the very Marines who carried him to safety.



"This exercise is very real," said Marine and TRUEx participant Staff Sgt. Robert Frederick amidst a throng of wounded Marines bandaged, mock-bloodied and triaged for care.

Some Marines were even moaning in pain, adding a layer of authenticity to the exercise that brought contemplative looks to the faces of many who stopped to observe the exercise.

Unlike nearly 50 percent of the 24th MEU, Frederick has deployed to Iraq before.

"Though you see uninjured Marines tending the wounded here, it's not at all uncommon to see wounded Marines tending those more severely wounded," Frederick said.



Awards, Re-enlistments and Fun



Above left: Commodore Sinclair Harris congratulates Capt. Gene Moran on completing yet another successful Navy tour while visiting the USS Philippine Sea during ESGEX. **Above right:** USS Bulkeley CO Cmdr. Bryan McGrath pins an award on a sailor while underway onboard the USS Bulkeley. **Directly Above:** Commodore Sinclair Harris jokes with MM3 Brian Smith of the USS Nashville just moments prior to his re-enlistment during which time, technically speaking, he was a civilian. The Commodore encouraged him to say anything he wanted to say about the Navy, his skipper, the ship's chow, anything--- repercussion-free.



Above: Sailors stationed aboard the amphibious transport dock USS Nashville (LPD 13) conduct a cleaning operation at Lakewood Park. U.S. Navy photo By Photographer's Mate Airman Tristan Miller

Nashville Crew Continues Culture of Community Service



By Lithographer 2nd Class (AW/SW) Pamela Coxe,

Nearly 50 percent of the 420 Sailors aboard the amphibious transport dock USS Nashville (LPD 13) fanned out across the Hampton Roads area March 8 in a string of community projects.

The ship's crew is working to achieve a goal it set to complete 4,000 hours of community service during Fiscal Year 2006.

"Our vision is to be the most benevolent amphibious warship on the waterfront," said Nashville Commanding Officer, Capt. Dee L. Mewbourne. "We have the capacity and want to excel in our mission to

give. We want the USS Nashville to be synonymous with volunteerism and good citizenship. I hope this becomes contagious. We encourage others to join us and do the same for the community," said Mewbourne.

Sailors painted benches and raked leaves, while some did mulch and edge work at two local parks. They also sorted and packed food items at the Food Bank of Hampton Roads and painted the interior of the Herald of His Coming Church of God In Christ where Nashville Sailor Air Traffic Controller 1st Class Cordel Garrett ministers.

Last month, the crew joined forces with the City of Norfolk, Department of Parks and Recreation and cleaned up Lafayette Park.

According to Keith Golden from the Department of Parks and Recreation, Sailors gathered more than 350 bags of leaves, litter and debris, saving the city \$9,000 in costs and more than 500 man-hours.

"The Navy's done a tremendous job. We do not get this type of service," exclaimed George Shoulders, crew leader of park enforcement.

Shipmates,

Getting a 35-year old ship, the oldest in the Iwo Jima Strike Group, ready for a projected six-month deployment brings with it a unique set of challenges. I am proud to



say that the officers and crew are meeting those challenges head on and are actively pursuing new ones. Nashville's is already proving that an old dog can learn new tricks and that with age comes wisdom, innovation and experience. Team Nashville has already developed a reputation as a can-do "gator," attaining an M-1 rating across all warfare areas in record time.

We have welcomed our primary weapon system, the Marines of Marine Service Support Group 24 aboard, and are looking forward to a great cruise with them. Recently, Nashville made history as the first ship to successfully land the unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle "fire scout" while underway.

We are actively pursuing relationships with the Mobile Diving and Salvage and Special Warfare Communities in order to provide a capable, flexible and mobile "close-in" staging platform for their unconventional warfare needs.

I am also happy to report that Nashville's inaugural Community Relations Project day was a huge success providing over 580 hours of community service to the city of Norfolk and the Second Harvest Food Bank. We are looking forward to more community events in the future.

While we have accomplished much during this pre-deployment period, our immediate future looks fairly busy as well with on-loading ammunition. There is also a dependent's cruise scheduled for March.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize our own support team, the families and our crew. The strength of Nashville is not measured by her ability to weather storms at sea, but rather in how her crew responds to a grateful nation's call. We are standing by to answer that call, as we can do so because of our family support.

Preparing for deployment is an all-hand's event, and not restricted to just those physically deploying. As the date of our upcoming departure approaches team Nashville will continue to prepare materially, physically and mentally, both onboard and at home to meet the challenges set before us. Standing by to answer all bells!

CAPT Dee Mewbourne
USS Nashville
Commanding Officer

USS Iwo Jima sailors give blood to service members serving overseas

Story and photos

By Lt. Karen E. Eifert

Sailors from amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) gave preciously during the final 30 minutes of a four-hour blood drive recently held aboard their ship after learning the blood would be used for military comrades fighting the war on terror overseas.

A seven man phlebotomy team from Portsmouth Naval Hospital mobile blood bank conducted the blood drive as part of a tri-service Army, Navy and Air Force venture throughout the Hampton Roads area. They hoped to collect at least 50 units of blood.

"We're only here about another thirty minutes, so I think this is all we'll get," said hospital corpsman (HM) 1st class Lenae Pacenka, who supervised the mobile blood team. Several sailors had already donated, but the total amount was only about 25 units.

The phlebotomy team revealed fifty percent of the blood collected would go to service members fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This blood goes to places like Baghdad and Fallujah," said HM3 Daniel Belin who has been working with the team for more than two years. "Basically we send blood wherever we have service members fighting overseas, he said

Equipped with this knowledge, Iwo Jima's Executive Officer Cmdr. Mark Sakaguchi took to the ship's 1-MC extolling the venture, explaining the eventual use of the blood and pledging to become a donor himself.

"I just want to remind every-



Above: FC2 Carolyn Tubbs Winces as she anticipates a needle stick that will draw her blood. Though she admits she's not a big fan of needles she said she was willing to go through the ordeal for the sake of service members fighting the war overseas. **Below:** Fleet Surgical Team Officer in Charge Cmdr. Marty Shields donates to the cause as well. He was one of the organizers of the blood drive.

one that a blood drive is currently underway on the ship," Sakaguchi said. "Blood collected here will be used to help your shipmates currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, so consider heading down to medical to help out the war effort. Support your fellow service members currently serving overseas."

Sakaguchi was joined in donating blood by tens of sailors who immediately lined the halls of the ship's medical department. They sat for just minutes as vital signs, hemoglobin levels and pre-screening histories were obtained, and then donated. Sailor response was so great the phlebotomy team ran out of supplies causing them to turn away sailors eager to donate to the cause. The mobile blood team collected 53 units of blood that day, 25 of which were drawn those last thirty minutes of the drive.

Pacenka found the sailor turn-out unbelievable. She said



the 42-day shelf-life of fresh blood feeds the continuous need for donors and emphasized sailors can donate blood every 56 days. Donated blood is screened for diseases and contaminants for about three days before beginning a seven-day trip as a top priority delivery item for use in military medical facilities overseas.

Fire control man 2nd class Carolyn Tubbs admitted she was not a regular blood donor and not a big fan of needles, but

chose to give blood anyway.

"I know we have service members overseas who need the blood," she said. "It hurt a little, but I did it because I was asked."

Pacenka said the unexpected success of the drive reflected positively on Iwo Jima's leadership.

"I was pleased the XO took time out of his day to show his support. Such strong support shows the blood drive is important," she said.

One Team, One Fight!



There is a Russian fable that tells of a Babushka (grand-mother) struggling to uproot a

turnip. She was unable to pry it from the ground when her husband came by.

Seeing her difficulty, he grabbed her around the waist and started pulling, trying to help her. Still, the turnip would not come loose. Then her grandson came by and saw them in their struggle. He grabbed his grandfather, and then he too started to pull, but to no avail. His sister arrived on the scene, saw what was going on and she too decided to help. She grabbed her brother by the waist, and now all four were pulling with all their might. Yet the turnip remained

lodged in the ground.

Just then, their puppy came by. He took hold of the little girl's skirt with his bite and joined into this game of tug-o-war. And the turnip popped out.

The moral of the story: everyone counts. Sometimes success comes from those whom we might least expect, and also, everyone is necessary in this process. It was the little puppy that made the difference, but remove any individual from the tug-o-war chain, and the turnip would have remained in the ground. We have passed the critical time of forming up our Expeditionary Strike Group. We know that each and every ship is important and has a crucial role to play. We know that the Marine contingent is vital. All are players. All are important.

When it comes to distributing of assets, though, it does not always appear as though all are equal. Yet we know that all are equally important, but different capabilities, different strengths, different needs and different sizes means differing allocations.

In the Chaplain Corps, we have

done our best to distribute the Religious Ministry Teams throughout the Strike Group to best serve the most Sailors. In so doing, we have Chaplains and Religious Program Specialists (RPs) on most ships, but not all. We remain one team though, and the Chaplains and RPs are committed to serving every need; every ship. We want at the very least to be available to every Sailor. We will do so in a variety of ways:

- In response to specific needs addressed to me by the Chaplains and/or C.O.s of any of our ships;
- With the "Holy Helo" to deliver ministry wherever we can as frequently as is feasible;
- Cross-decking Chaplains when there is a reason or need;
- By training Lay Readers to provide worship opportunities for every Ship; and
- With open lines of communication.

**Sincerely,
Father Milton Gianulis
Greek Orthodox Priest**

Spiritual Readiness enhances Operational Readiness



Caption: Chaplains Carl Trost (left), Russ Hale (middle) and Michael Hendrickson (right) conduct lay leader training for USS Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group lay leaders. This training was conducted as part of the strike group's pre-deployment training.

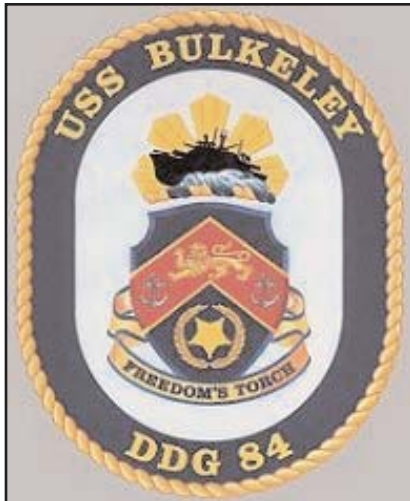
Story and photo by Lt. Karen E. Eifert

Chaplains from the USS Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) conducted lay leader training for lay leaders comprising the strike group at the Fleet Ministry Center located onboard Naval Station Norfolk from March 15 and 16.

The lay leader training was designed to introduce lay leaders across all faith groups of the ESG to basic concepts inherent to institutional ministry, as well as traditions in which they may be asked to participate.

"All of our lay leaders must be an active member of a church and obtain some type of approving letter from their ecclesiastical body," said Commander Amphibious

Bulkeley junior officers talk SWO quals with commodore



By Ensign Padraic H. McDermott

Every two weeks, the Ensigns of USS Bulkeley (DDG 84) meet with their Commanding Officer to talk about their Surface Warfare qualification progress. Since the introduction of the current system of Surface Warfare Officer training three years ago, each ship has adapted the sea-based curriculum in her own way; Bulkeley's way has been rigorous.

Unlike previous training regimes that sent new division officers to Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) for six months prior to their first sea tour, the new system sends new officers straight to the Fleet. There, the Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, and Training Officer are armed with a CD-based at-sea curriculum and the cumulative experiences of the wardroom, chief's mess, and deckplate leaders to qualify the new ensigns as Surface Warfare Officers.

Key to the success of the system is command involvement. In Bulkeley, the Captain sits down with his "Ensign Mess" every second Friday for a session that regu-

larly stretches to an hour. Each SWO candidate is quizzed on status of qualifications, training completed in the past half-month, and goals and milestones they've set for themselves. The meetings are an opportunity for the CO and XO to stay on top of any issues an individual might have during the qual process, and to gauge the progress of the ensigns.

On Friday, 10 February, the junior officers sat in front of another officer very interested in their SWO qualification progress: Captain Sinclair Harris, Commander of Amphibious Squadron Four and USS Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group. Commodore Harris flew to Bulkeley that morning to accomplish a variety of tasks, and one of them was to sit down and talk qualifications.

The meeting took an hour in the midst of a packed schedule. The Commodore asked the Ensigns about their progress, the new at-sea curriculum, and their feelings about the lack of training received prior to reporting to the ship. The Commodore received a great deal of valuable feedback from the assembled junior officers, and he indicated that he would carry their concerns forward to the Surface Force Major Commanders Conference in late March.

The SWO qualification remains a challenging career milestone for all new ensigns. As ships become more technologically advanced, young officers must strive to keep pace with the changing world around them. Bulkeley's ensigns are working hard together with their chain of command to ensure they stay ahead of the power curve.

To the Sailors and Marines of the IWO ESG and their families,

The
Wolfpack of USS
Bulkeley (DDG 84)
is honored be a part
of this great Blue-



Green Team, and we are excited to work together over the course of this year. While we know not the specifics of our tasking once we deploy, we do know that it will be through teamwork and cooperation that mission success will follow.

The strength of the Expeditionary Strike Group is in the diversity of power it brings to the fight. USS Bulkeley will help to provide a full menu of classic destroyer functions, including sea control and shore bombardment, in addition to deep land attack and airspace dominance. We are working hard every day to be at the top of our readiness for our deployment, and I promise you, we will be ready.

Our families are busy preparing also, and a good bit of the month of March will be devoted to pre-deployment seminars and Family Support Group meetings. For those of you who have deployed before, you know that there is a certain "psychology" of deployment. Informational seminars help grizzled old deployment veterans share this insight with folks who may be deploying for the first time and their families. We are working hard to ensure all of our families are aware of the great support networks available while we are gone, and our partners at the Fleet and Family Support Center in Norfolk are helping us every step of the way.

Sincerely,

CMDR. Bryan McGrath, USN

Commanding Officer

USS BULKELEY (DDG 84)

Fleet and Family Support Center helps ensure ISG junior sailor success

**Story and photo
by Lt. Karen E. Eifert**

Amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) conducted Life Skills Training (LST) while underway for its E-1 to E-4 sailors from March 29 to April 1 teaching them to build proficiencies that encourage success both in their professional and personal lives.

This version of LST, which was designed by the Fleet and Family Service Center (FFSC) in conjunction with Iwo Jima's command chaplain Cmdr. Milt Gianulis and Command Master Chief James Cox, was geared toward helping Iwo Jima's first-tour sailors better navigate their naval careers.

"Military standards will

always require us to reinforce positive values and help young sailors adjust to the Navy," said Gianulis. "Sometimes sailors have personal issues they need to deal with or negative values they have to lose, and this program is designed to help them do both."

Classes scheduled throughout the four days included instruction in Navy Core Values, Sexual Assault Victim Intervention, the Navy's Drug and Alcohol Program and Suicide Intervention and Awareness. Classes in the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and the Command Managed Equal Opportunity Program also comprised the schedule.

Laressa M. Witt, a domestic violence prevention educator with FFSC

who got underway with the ship to help teach classes, said more than half of the sailors who attended LST were either new to the ship or had never before made a deployment.

"The sailors voiced practical concerns like paying their bills while deployed, but others were very concerned about maintaining relationships with significant others, and being away from family and friends for so long," Witt said. "We offer a prevention program that allows service members to learn to handle life issues like these better."

One sailor who attended LST said the interpersonal skills training came at a good time, right when she was feeling the pressure of additional responsibilities resulting from the ship's

aggressive pre-deployment workout schedule.

"I'm the type of person who's quiet, but I always do my job," said the sailor. "The class taught me how to handle myself when my chief starts yelling at everyone to get things done faster."

Witt said the junior sailors confided that fatigue resulting from long work hours, long chow lines and close shipboard living quarters challenged many of them. She also said they appreciated the opportunity to talk through these frustrations, as well as discover coping mechanisms.

Iwo Jima invested four full days to LST because it believes the pay-off will be huge by way of preventing disciplinary problems and increasing sailor productivity and morale.

Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group Commander Commodore Sinclair M. Harris' strongly endorsed LST for its merit and potential to help many sailors serving on the ship.

"We would be remiss if we did not include this type of training in our pre-deployment schedule because people remain our greatest military asset," Harris said. "While we have not run into many discipline and morale issues, there's nothing wrong with staying ahead of the power curve and working to achieve the highest level of excellence possible."

Left: Laressa Witt tells FCSN Gary Coreas about some of the classes offered by the FFSC. Witt got underway with the USS Iwo Jima to teach LST classes during ESGEX.





Greetings from CO of the Cole

Hello,

I consider it an honor and a pleasure to serve with each of you as your Captain. As we start our duty together I want to share with you my command vision. It will serve to guide us as we execute the Cole mission. Our mission, simply put, is to conduct prompt, sustained naval operations in support of national security objectives and if forced to fight-WIN!

The following are basic principles that will help you understand my focus and guide you in making day-to-day decisions:

The Standard is Excellence. The standard for Cole is excellence. This means striving to do everything we do the right way, the first time. Quality control is a function of every level in the chain of command. Remember that it takes less time to do something right than it does to do it twice. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing right. I will accept honest mistakes from a person trying to do well. (However, let us strive to learn from the mistakes of others - it is not necessary to do all our learning by making mistakes!). Every Sailor doing their best has my

complete backing and respect.

Always do the right thing! This is a reflection of your personal integrity and honor. This principle applies "24 and 7" - on ship and off. At all times we are Sailors and citizens representing the Cole and the U.S. Navy. Remember and apply daily the Navy's core values of honor, courage, and commitment! Set the example for those who work for and with you. Help your shipmates make the right decision when you find them in a difficult situation. Lend a hand when necessary, a little common sense, and courtesy goes a long way.

Take care of one another! I am interested in the personal well being of each individual and family member assigned to Cole from the moment they receive orders to our command. I expect every Cole Sailor to feel the same. You must treat each other with the mutual respect and courtesy with which you want others to treat you (the Golden Rule is alive and well in Cole). Never hesitate to tell someone they've done a good job, in fact I expect it. Use your experience to provide guidance. Every Sailor in Cole has a contributing role in our mission. No one is expendable - everyone is a valued member of our team!

Always be ready! This applies to two areas - people and equipment. I expect every piece of gear in the ship to work. Each of you must work to be the best you can be both professionally and personally. To be ALWAYS READY we must ensure we are trained and competent. We will train so our actions are correct and second nature when required to per-

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USS Cole Continues to prove: *She's the Determined Warrior*

By Ensign Brenna McKinley

The USS Cole has been extremely successful and busy during our present underway at sea. In the span of 9 days we have completed exercises varying from Undersea Warfare to Air Defense and many in between. Our sailors pull long hours and remain flexible at all times to help the ship's operational tempo.

Cole has completed our training phase where we verify all our warfare, operational, and engineering departments are ready for deployment and flexing. We are currently in our pre-deployment phase where we hone our skills and challenge our sailors with harder, more complex exercises.

This week in particular was devoted to Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and Supported Arms Coordination Control (SACC) Exercises. Our Anti-Submarine Warfare division spent two straight days prosecuting submarines in controlled exercises. They performed exceptionally well and tracked the sub proficiently.

The Commodore of PHIBRON4 was able to fly to Cole from the IWO to observe our warfare commanders in action. COLE was tasked to perform in a SACCEX with the 24th MEU, Battalion 1-8. In this exercise Cole will fire 5" rounds from our MK 45 deck gun onto shore to support an amphibious assault.

From the shore the Marines will guide our rounds by radio coordination to our ship-board Naval Ship Fire Support (NSFS) team. Additionally other exercises we performed were Air Defense (ADEX) where we control LEER Jets and Helos, and a Standard Land Attack Missile (SLAMEX) a simulated Tomahawk missile launch. We took part in playing enemy forces with our small boats faking attacks against the IWO JIMA, flexing their defenses. The COLE has proved dexterous and adept in all our tasking and continuous to amplify our name DETERMINED WARRIOR.

Lay Leader training continued from page 12

Squadron Four chaplain Lt. Russ Hale. "This is their church telling us they know this individual, and approve of them to represent their faith."

The all-day faith training sessions covered a wide range of subjects to include the appropriate use of the word 'God,' pluralism, otherwise known as religious tolerance, and burials-at-sea. The training even touched on the topics of suicide and pornography.

"Don't try to be something that you're not. Be true to yourself, your religion and your traditions--- and be creative," suggested Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Carl Trost of the Fleet Ministry Center. Trost says lay leaders play a crucial role in assisting the ESG chaplains meet the spiritual needs of the more than 3,500 sailors who could conceivably fall under a total of 250 different faith groups.

"I remember one time when my ship pulled into port in Bahrain. I noticed everyone was buying a lot of gold, so that evening

when I said prayer over the 1-MC I said, 'Lord, help us not to judge one another by the bling bling that we own,'" he laughed. "Doing things like that will help keep you out of a rut during evening prayer."

One of the more hands-on events of the training involved a simulated lay-led Roman Catholic service led by Lt. Michael Hendrickson, the Catholic Priest assigned to the USS Iwo Jima. This portion of the training pointed out facts the new lay leader might find surprising. For instance, by Navy regulations Catholic lay leaders can serve communion with stipulations; lay leaders can administer consecrated Eucharist, not the blood of Christ. Additionally, a consecrated host must remain in a secure location if it is kept onboard a vessel. Finally, lay leaders cannot conduct a mass, only assist.

Although the ESG chaplains provided this very in-depth training as part of pre-deployment training, they also say they

view this as a crucial ground for sailors who must be away from their family members six months at a time and serve during a time of war.

"You would not be human if you didn't experience some sort of conflict as a result of serving as both a lay leader and a warrior," said ESG command chaplain Cmdr. Milt Gianulis, a Greek Orthodox priest attached to the USS Iwo Jima. Gianulis says that if the ESG parts ways while underway, lay leaders can prevent sailors from going extended periods of time without spiritual nurturance, which can be at the core of troop morale and operational readiness.

While deployed the strike group chaplains serve as advocates of religious expression for the entire strike group, and will be responsible for ensuring everyone has an avenue for expressing their faith needs.

Cole vision continued from page 15

form under stressful conditions. I expect us to operate and maintain the ship and her equipment in accordance with all applicable operating guidelines and procedures. Instructions such as EOSS/CSOSS/PMS are definitely mandatory.

Be safe! I cannot stress Safety enough. Safety is an absolutely vital consideration in every evolution-including routine ones - in a Navy warship. Safety precautions are written in the blood of Sailors who failed to heed them. I am the only person onboard who can authorize the bypassing of any safety feature or procedure.

Communicate! No one of us has all the answers. To be successful as a team we must be comfortable passing information up, down, and across the chain-of-command. If you are uncomfortable with a situation, say something - you may see the one thing no one else has. Bearers of

bad news will never be shot onboard COLE! The more information we have the better each of us will be prepared to perform our individual jobs. I expect each Sailor, division, and department to have tremendous pride in their individual jobs and demonstrate it by keeping fellow shipmates aware of what is happening in their areas.

Likewise, I expect every Cole crew member to demonstrate with modesty, their pride and expertise to other commands in the community. If one of our sister ships needs our help we will provide whatever we can, while maintaining a positive attitude. When working with maintenance facilities and staffs we will provide whatever support or information we can. I would like departing visitors, civilian or military, to want to return to COLE because of the proud and professional people they meet, the sharp appearance of the ship, and the positive experience

they have onboard.

In summary, every job, every person is important. There is no such thing as an unimportant job in Cole. The ability of Cole to perform as a fighting ship depends totally on the combined performance and teamwork of every crew member. Remember the exploits and example set by Sgt. Darrell Cole and the ultimate sacrifice made by our shipmates listed in the Hall of Heroes. Be proud of and enjoy what you do onboard Cole. Be positive and know that together we can accomplish anything that comes our way. Look for ways to make yourself, your shipmates, and Cole better!

Cmdr. Bradley W. Roberson
Commanding Officer
USS COLE (DDG 67)
Determined Warrior

Talking with CSFTL Rear Adm. Richard O'Hanlon

His views on ISG's upcoming deployment, future of ESG's and more

**Interview conducted
by Lt. Karen E. Eifert**

Commander Strike Force Training Atlantic (CSFTL) Rear Adm. Richard O'Hanlon, job has the immense responsibility of taking individual ships and pulling them together into a strike group. He ensures the ability of ships based on the Atlantic coast to work and fight together as a single fighting unit, as well as their ability to perform their warfare areas in an integrated environment. CSFTL's primary focuses are on command and control responsibilities, battle rhythm planning, and developing group ship missions, and he own all Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) and Carrier Strike Group (CSG) integrated training on the Atlantic coast.

When CSFTL visited the ships of the Iwo Jima Strike Group (ISG) early April with a staff of roughly 150 evaluators, it was to supervise a roughly 10-day at-sea period during phase I of the Iwo Jima Strike Group's (ISG) ESG exercise (ESGEX).

The CSFTL staff put the ISG's six ships and submarine in an integrated training environment, testing their ability to perform air warfare, air defense, anti-surface warfare, maritime interdiction operations and maritime superiority operations with aggressive back-to-back almost round-the-clock training scenarios.

The staff drove the ISG participants in anti-piracy scenarios and Visit, Board, Search and Seizure drills. They evaluated the ISG's ability to tactically distinguish potential adversaries and drove them to excel at coordinated Tomahawk missile exercises, which comprised a good number of the ISG exercises.

At the close of ESGEX phase, Rear Adm. O'Hanlon took time to reflect on the ISG's performance as well as discuss the ISG's upcoming deployment, the future of ESG's and more.

How do you feel the ESGEX is going?

I think this has been a tremendous exercise, and the ISG has learned a lot during our time onboard. One thing you have to consider is that ESGs never really did this strike group business before. More traditional strike groups have had the background to draw upon when preparing for something like ESGEX. So, what we provided was a lot of mentorship and on-the-spot training on things like battle rhythm planning, command and control and how to best use assets to prosecute targets in the various air, surface and sub-surface warfare areas. The strike group is up to full fighting speed, but it takes a lot of hard work. It's an all hands effort by the planners and operators onboard, he said."

Where does the ESG excel? The ESG actually excels in air defense, battle rhythm planning, command and control and Tomahawk mission planning. It's a testament to the Iwo Jima as a centerpiece of the strike group, the ships that support her, and her ability to handle real-world emergencies. During my time onboard, I watched her respond to two real-world emergencies:

the downing of a USAF pilot, and a strike group medevac. Neither negatively impacted the training exercises.

What is the greatest real-world threat the ISG will face during deployment?

The ships should be ready for any contingencies as they traverse the straits. For example, the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal-- There's always an opportunity to run into high-speed boats while traversing the straits. You never know if those are legitimate boats or boats with criminal or hostile intent, so you have to be prepared.

The ships are also in harms way because they'll be within weapons and sensor range of all countries that are in the Arabian Gulf, so the strike group has to remain on its toes at all times to fend off potential attackers.

But there's no doubt the greatest dangers will be those facing the Marines and those sailors directly supporting them ashore. They're the ones bearing the greatest potential for harm. I don't know what the mission will be, and all this I say is in relation to

Continued on page 20



Above: Rear Adm. O'Hanlon watches as the Visit, board, search and seizure team onboard the USS Nashville demonstrates some of their drills. **Photo by LI1 Shonn D. Moore**

Commitment onboard USS Whidbey Island:

Sailor prepares to make her mark serving as an Individual Augmentee

Feature Story by: JO3 Timothy S. Humphrey

It would take you over 20 hours by air to reach Baghdad from the Norfolk region. That's around 6,300 miles. A plane ticket would be well over \$1,500 dollars. Not to mention the huge climate difference. Baghdad is surrounded by desert, making it unbearably hot and arid during the spring and summer, while the Hampton Roads area is varied and moderate. And then there's the war occupying the region at the moment, with our country helping to free the people of Iraq and laying the foundation of democracy in the largely Arabic nation.

For most, these reasons, along with having to leave their home and families, for Baghdad would seem like a burden. But for one sailor, it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

CS2(SW) Shawn Piccolo-Norberto, stationed aboard USS Whidbey Island, has volunteered to serve as a team leader at Fort Suse Detention Facility in northeast Baghdad, Iraq this summer as part of the Individual Augmentation program. For Piccolo-Norberto, it was something she couldn't pass up, not only for herself, but also for her country.

"I feel honored to help serve my country," said Piccolo-Norberto. "It'll be very difficult, but all my years in the service have prepared me for a moment like this."

"I entered the military during a time of war, but never got the chance to contribute," admitted Piccolo-Norberto. "Now, given the opportunity to participate in the war, I'll give to my country all that is needed."

In the Individual Augmentation program, a joint program between the Army and Navy, Sailors are used to fill billets in Iraq in this time of war. Of course, to be in a position to serve in the program, one needs solid credentials. But that was something Piccolo-Norberto needed not to worry about. She first enlisted in the military in the fall of 1992 with the United States Marine Corps after receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pittsburgh, majoring in Criminal Justice. In the Marines, she served as a Military Police Officer.

Upon completion of her first enlistment in September of 1996, Piccolo-Norberto served in the Selected Marine Corps Reserves. But not more than 20 months later, she was called upon to serve as an active reservist. While serving a tour in Providence, R.I., Piccolo-Norberto began to explore her love for the culinary arts by attending the University of Johnson and Wales. She eventually received her Associates degree in the Culinary Arts in 2003 while stationed at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, Colorado.

While serving in

Colorado, Piccolo-Norberto decided to switch careers and join the Navy as a culinary specialist. After completing CS "A" School in May of 2004, she reported onboard USS Whidbey Island. During her time aboard USS Whidbey Island, she used her previous experience in law enforcement in the Marines to serve as command Master-At-Arms assistant for the last year. This helped fuel her hunger to get back into security, and when the job as team leader at Fort Suse opened, Piccolo-Norberto jumped at it. "I missed it from my time in the Corps, and saw it as something special that only comes along once in a lifetime," said Piccolo-Norberto.

Experience isn't all that this sailor has to offer, said CMDCM(SW/AW) Edward Lavieri. "CS2 is one of USS Whidbey Island's superstars. She approaches things with vigor and enthusiasm. Her national pride is unmatched on the ship, as is her military bearing. Her spirit uplifts others."

CS2(SW) Shannon Alston, Piccolo-Norberto's co-worker on the mess decks, agreed with what Lavieri said about her. "She has a great outlook towards the military," said Alston. "Everything's cut and dry with her. Her love for the military is unmatched."

Piccolo-Norberto's responsibilities at Fort Suse will be to lead a team of 25 men to help assist with nearly 1,000 detainees. She will

serve in Iraq until April of 2007, when she'll report back to the ship. To prepare for this, Piccolo-Norberto will go through two weeks of team training at Port Hueneme, California. Next she will conduct combat and detainee training at Fort Bliss, Texas. Upon completion, she'll report to the Joint Reception Processing Center in Kuwait City, Kuwait, where she'll finally be transported to Iraq for duty.

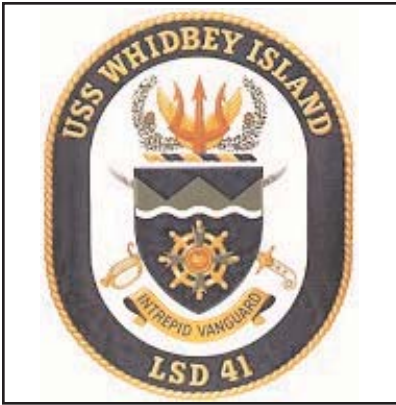
According to Piccolo-Norberto, it's all worth the trouble in the end for her career.

"When I come back, I hope to have a greater sense of pride in serving my country," explained Piccolo-Norberto. "I hope to strengthen my honor and pride, and also my intensity for the job."

And despite the time away, her husband couldn't be prouder. "My husband is so proud," said Piccolo-Norberto. "Not only does he agree it's a good thing for my career, but being a former Marine himself, he wishes he could go, since he never got to."

To many, Piccolo-Norberto is already the model shipmate. "Certainly, not all Sailors have the opportunity to serve in a direct combat role or in support of detainee efforts," said Lavieri. "CS2 will come back with stories and experiences that will inspire others to volunteer for duty in Iraq as she did."

Whidbey Idol: Talent onboard USS Whidbey Island



By JO3 Timothy S. Humphrey

When it comes to the history of American music, a lot of musical trends have come from the British Isles. Prime examples extend from Beatlemania to the underground punk scene of the late 1960's to the kicking and screaming of heavy metal.

But so far in this young millennium, arguably the most influential British musical craze has been a little show that was titled, "Pop Idol." That "little" show has blossomed stateside into the ratings juggernaut and phenomenon known as "American Idol", appearing on the Fox network. That influence has carried over into the United States Navy. The USS Whidbey Island (LSD-41), stationed in Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Virginia, began a talent competition titled "WHIDBEY Idol", modeled after "American Idol". The goal was to help keep the morale of the sailors up and to entertain the sailors while underway by giving them a glance of the talents of their shipmates.

Petty Officer 1st Class Richard C. Ankney Jr., a hospital corpsman stationed aboard the ship, who hosted and co-created the

competition, said the purpose behind the competition was to improve morale by giving the crew something to keep themselves entertained.

"When underway, sailors want to relax after a long day and have a good time. We wondered why we couldn't have some fun, and share it among the crew," said Ankney. "We wanted to bring a new element of fun."

But the idea for a coordinated talent show didn't just come from scratch said Command Master Chief Edward Lavieri, co-creator of 'WHIDBEY Idol'. "The ship's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation committee was already adept at running karaoke nights. My intent was to increase contestant and audience participation, to maximize it into a ship-wide event," said Lavieri.

Lavieri continued, "Like many great things, it all started out with an small idea. After a night of watching karaoke, it reminded me of the show, and I thought why couldn't we entertain our ship with this type of show."

"One night underway, I visited with Petty Officer Ankney in medical, and asked him if he thought he could turn 'WHIDBEY Idol' into a reality," said Lavieri. "He liked the idea, accepted the challenge, and exceeded my own personal expectations. He assembled a support team who worked magic to make it all come together seamlessly."

The support team included Petty Officer 3rd Class William Cockrell and the IC shop, along with the MWR committee.

Five competitions were held throughout the course of the

Continued on page 20

To the Sailors and Marines of the IWO JIMA,

Expeditionary Strike Group (IWO ESG), and to their families and friends,

Greetings. Having recently assumed command of the USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41) from CMDR. Cedric Pringle, I feel like the luckiest and most privileged member of an exceptional Team. Team USS Whidbey Island is ready to sail into harm's way with the rest of the IWO ESG. Together, we know the flexibility and combat power resident in the strike force will provide our nation's leaders with unparalleled presence, maritime security, contingency response, and power projection options.

USS Whidbey Island stands ready to fully support the almost 400 Marines of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) who will call our ship "home" while deployed. These Marines will be our shipmates just as much as the 330 permanent Navy members of our crew. As an amphibious warship, USS Whidbey Island was designed and built with a principal purpose in mind - to take Marines to the fight wherever and whenever called upon, and to sustain those Marines from the sea.

Once we deploy we know the pressures and challenges our loved ones will face at home will at times seem overwhelming. For this reason, we are holding several pre-deployment seminars and information sessions in mid-March and again in May. Our combat readiness overseas is directly linked to the support networks and preparedness of our families and friends at home. The professionals at the Fleet and Family Support Center here in Norfolk are standing by to help our loved ones while we are deployed, providing our Sailors peace of mind and the ability to focus on the missions ahead.

Once again, the Sailors of USS Whidbey Island are honored to be part of the IWO ESG Blue - Green Combat Team.

Sincerely,
CMDR. Erik M. Ross, USN
Commanding Officer
USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41)



Rear Adm. O'Hanlon Continued from page 17

places the ISG may be asked to serve like Iraq, Afghanistan or the Horn of Africa.

Where do you see the future of the ESG? I think we'll see a flag officer who's in charge of amphibious-related ships in each major theatre. That flag officer will be located ashore in Bahrain, the Arabian Gulf, the Western Pacific, or the Mediterranean.

What's the idea behind the Expeditionary Strike Force? This idea is one where different groups come to meld as one force. For instance, an ESG and a CSG coming together. I hope we find over the next few years the Navy trains more as a force. This is because, as we saw in the early days of OIF and OEF, there were a lot of strike operations that required several

carriers to satisfy the air power demand.

We're going against a very large adversary, so we need a very large campaign. There's going to be a large tendency to train at sea as a force with several ESG's coming together to form one fighting unit. We would still deploy as groups, but if something big were to happen, several groups would come together in theatre to create the force and conduct the necessary mission.

How do you see Individual Augmentees (IA's) progressing in the Navy? I'm proud of the Navy for doing these IA's. The Marines and Army have been bearing the brunt of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the way of manpower for activities like security forces, teams to train Iraqi soldiers and police,

prison guards and all kinds of jobs that augment the coalition effort. Many of these jobs can be performed by Navy personnel. For instance, starting next month the Navy will assume command over Joint Task Force (JTF) Horn of Africa in Djibouti, which has traditionally been a Marine-centric Joint Task Force. This has been done to ease the burden for our Marine partners. I'll admit IA is real tough on the Navy because it involves ripping people out of their normally-assigned jobs to go into a combat without providing replacements. There's been talk in the joint world of turning these IA billets into legitimate PCS moves, but I don't know how much progress has been made on that front.

Whidbey Idol continued from page 19

events, which were open to all hands to attend, and were broadcasted on Site Television.

Turnout for the first event was well over expectations and showed that the crew was ready to support the 'WHIDBEY Idol' idea said Ankney.

"That first group that turned out to compete amazed us. Of course, we had to whittle it down with each competition," explained.

To help weed out the contestants, a trio of judges consisting of different shipmates each competition acted as the infamous 'American Idol' judges, giving critiques of each contestant.

But in the end, it was up to the crew to vote and choose who went on, and

who left.

"There were quite a few good acts, and even more horrendous ones," laughs Ankney. "But it was all in good fun."

After the five events, the field was narrowed to four acts, and a winner was declared. Seaman Daniel Yang was the inaugural victor of the 'WHIDBEY Idol' competition. And to think Yang almost didn't enter the competition.

"I was nervous at first, but my life always revolved around music," declared Yang. "I sang and played instruments all my life, so after that first performance, I knew I had a chance to win."

For his win, Yang won a \$ 500 gift certificate to the Navy Exchange. But according to Yang, he won something that meant a little more.

"The competition allowed me to show my fellow shipmates that there's more to me," said Yang. "I showed everyone I have some talent, and to be honest, that felt pretty good."

But don't expect the 'WHIDBEY Idol' competition to end after this first season.

"I wouldn't mind seeing it continue, and become a regular, tradition aboard the ship. I want it to continue to grow just like the show, to become a tradition with many editions," said Ankney.

REMEMBER, REMEMBER, REMEMBER, REMEMBER

Church services are held daily while underway. Contact your chaplain, RP or lay leader for more details.

Physical Fitness assessment will be held April 18 and 24 at 9 a.m. on Naval Station Norfolk. Meet at the track across from the Gilbert Street gym.

The ISG's Ombudsmen are Chaplain Hale's Wife, Becky Hale and Ms. Pearl Morris, mother of IS1 Tanya Evans.

Pre-deployment briefing will be held April 20 on Little Creek at 6:00 p.m.

PACE classes can only be conducted if 10 people per class enroll. Sign up now and don't let your shipmates down.

CPR4 Hail and Farewell will be held April 21 from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Breezy Point Officers Club. Come out, eat some good food, meet the new folks and say farewell to those leaving.

Sign up for split pay now since this takes a few weeks to implement.

Wills and powers of attorney can be completed now at the Navy Legal Services Office (NLSO). Don't delay, as the work involved can take up to a month to complete.

Get your taxes done for free at Naval Station Norfolk, also at NLSO. Taxes must be filed by midnight April 17.